

- Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
- FINAL
- April 22, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
- Chenery Middle School Community Room

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- *[Note: This was a joint meeting of the Warrant Committee and the Board of Selectmen. The School Committee was also present and had convened separately before the meeting.]*
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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Libensen, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Leclerc, SC Chair Rittenburg
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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg, Town Treasurer Carman, BOS Members: Jones and Firenze
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- Members Absent: Lynch
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- The WC meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Chair Curtis.
- The BOS meeting was called to order at 7:33 by BOS Chair Leclerc.
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- Chair Curtis began the meeting by inviting Mr. Robert Reardon, Chairman of the Board of Assessors, to the WC table.
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- ***Warrant Articles for April Town Meeting***
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- Chair Curtis noted that Mr. Reardon would provide additional information on **Article 26: Senior Tax Deferral Income Limit**. He also noted that the WC would address **Article 30: Shared Institutional Parking Lots**.
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- Regarding **Article 26: Senior Tax Deferral Income Limit**, Mr. Reardon began by saying that he too was concerned that this Article (which allows senior citizens to defer tax payments) was tied in to the economy (cost of living) and tied to state tax returns. He noted that 20 people participated in the deferral and they deferred a total of \$616K. The program is paying for itself and the interest rate is 8%. The \$40K income cutoff has excluded a number of people, which is why \$49K is being proposed by the state. Member Allison noted that, in linking to the state standard, she would appreciate insight into the index that generated the state's increases. Mr. Reardon replied that the index is tied to the cost of living standard and social security. Member Allison asked if the WC could vote on this annually? For example, make it \$49K this year, but look at it anew each year in case there is a change in the state formula that the WC is not comfortable with. Mr. Reardon replied that the town can't set its own standards. Belmont gets its authority from the Commonwealth of Mass. The town can adopt the \$49K limit or not

adopt and stay at \$40K. Member Widmer asked if the \$49K was across the board, e.g. single/married? Mr. Reardon replied that yes, it was across the board.

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- Member Hofmann moved to support Article 26 with favorable action. The WC voted 13 - 1 for favorable action.

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- Regarding **Article 25: Resolution Concerning the Belmont Hill School**, Mr. Reardon said that he is working on coming up with a formula (modeling after Cambridge using land area measurements) for PILOT program contributions. Singling out one place is not appropriate, he said, it needs to be on a town-wide basis.

- *The Board of Selectmen moved:* To dismiss Article 25.
- The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

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- Regarding **Article 30 - Zoning By-Law: Shared Institutional Parking Lots**, Chair Curtis noted that the Planning Board (PB) sees this as codification of an existing practice. They believe that codifying will not result in an increase of the practice. BOS Chair Leclerc said he supports this Article, as the PB has created safeguards that should prohibit large commercial vehicles from parking long-term in lots.

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- The WC took no position on Article 30.

Discussion of Town Budget and Tiers of Restoration

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- Chair Curtis invited the SC to the WC table. Chair Curtis reviewed the budget revenue numbers and noted that the \$150K previously allocated for OPEB will be re-allocated to the town side of the budget (which gets the town budget back to where it was before the mid-year local aid cuts). It appears that the Quinn bill will come back in, which amounts to \$55K in local aid. The School budget has received ARRA money and IDEA grant funding. The total available funds for the schools is \$39.4M and for the town \$29.4M. Included in those numbers is the PPO health insurance savings PPO (\$160K town and school \$225K).

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- Town Administrator Younger said that there will be no employees brought back into the FY10 budget, which will impact FY11. If the unions had agreed to a wage-freeze, the positions would have been put back in. He noted that the Capital budget “should be restored” but can’t be with the \$29.4M available funds budget. Chair Curtis asked if the Town Administrator would make an override request. Mr. Younger replied that no override request would be made. He is more concerned with FY11 and would rather prime for a potential FY11 override.

Discussion of Federal Stimulus Funds (ARRA and IDEA) and Impact on the School Budget

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- SC Chair Rittenburg said that the school department is also focused on long-term planning. We don’t want to restore things that can’t be sustained. The school side has

been fortunate with the stimulus money. We will stick with 50/50 guideline and use 50% to plug holes and 50% for long-term planning as we feel that this is the responsible way to proceed. \$850K will be used to restore the tiers for personnel. Rittenburg added that the SC has not yet met with Administrative Council, but is hoping that 14-15 positions (teachers and guidance) will be restored. She emphasized that reductions and restructuring will occur. With the other 50%, the SC hopes to do the innovative programs that it is intended for, as well as the purchase of textbooks and supplies. Rittenburg concluded by saying that the SC will also not be requesting an operating override: "We want to make Wellington a priority, and stimulus money is taxpayer money."

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BOS Member Jones noted that the federal government has not yet decided on stimulus guidelines. He advised that stimulus recipients must be very careful moving forward – e.g. "do nothing until it is in writing." BOS Member Firenze noted that \$1.45M in free cash was still in reserve for FY10, and he acknowledged that the town and schools were not digging into reserves, but rather cutting spending back to balance the budget. WC Chair Curtis noted that \$800,000 had already been allocated to the FY10 budget, and that the snow removal totals for FY09 were not yet final. BOS Member Firenze added that a lot of work is going on to look at meaningful structural changes in town – an ongoing effort which will hopefully help address FY11 spending. Member Widmer agreed but added that the stimulus money is one-time (maybe two-time) money which underscores a most serious long-term budget problem. BOS Member Jones added that every year there are "marginal cuts" which over time amount to significant reductions to the school and town offerings. The DPW, for example, is a town department that is currently being subsidized by the Enterprise systems.

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Town Meeting

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Chair Curtis said that while there is now no need for him to address override scenarios, he would discuss the budget as well as the role of stimulus funding and its help in obviating an override request. He will also address the "budget busters," e.g., retirement, healthcare, and salaries. Member Allison noted that it was important that TM understand that Belmont had been very fortunate in that federal funding formula calculations provided the town with \$1.7 million in stimulus money earmarked for education. Generally state funding formulas do not work to Belmont's advantage and without the federal money this would be a very different discussion. The WC discussed the need to let residents know what is coming down the road in the way of structural budget shortfalls.

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Minutes

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The minutes from 3/25/09, 4/1/09, 4/8/09, and 4/15/09 were approved, with abstentions from members who were absent from various meetings.

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- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:04 pm.
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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary